



EIGHT KEYS TO SELF-RELIANCE

BY SR. PATRICIA M. MCCORMACK, IHM, EdD

1. AUTONOMY is an inner sense of respectful assertiveness, self-control, responsible independence, and personal authority. **SELF-RELIANCE** is a by-product of autonomy.

2. When autonomy develops, children do not require external motivation, rewards, or bribes in order to make positive choices. (Such practices are counterproductive for developing self-reliance!) Autonomous children take satisfaction in making appropriate decisions, managing daily living without requiring supervision, practicing self-control, and conquering challenges.

3. Every person experiences failures that create a sense of shame and self-doubt. Such errors can either become stepping stones for future self-improvement or paralyze the child's self-reliance. When efforts prove successful on most occasions, **SELF-CONTROL** and **WILLPOWER** become personality traits.

4. Repeated lack of age-appropriate personal power produces bullies, who are walking containers of resentment and anger.

5. Autonomy takes root through repeated opportunities to practice behaviors that create self-reliance: responsible independence, intrinsic self-control, respectful assertiveness, accountability.

6. Strengthen self-reliance by doing nothing for children that they can do for themselves, emphasizing effort over results, and helping children to acknowledge and learn from mistakes and make restitution.

7. The desire for personal autonomy begins around age two. Unless it will lead to moral or mortal harm, let children make decisions and work with the natural consequences. Note: Too many choices paralyze. Limit choices to two or three selections.

8. Autonomy promotes school success. Practice these parenting tips:

■ **Avoid micromanaging.**

Encourage children to manage their own activities while being resourceful and mindful of their family needs. Avoid planning the details of a child's life.

■ **Establish age-appropriate privileges and responsibilities.** Make age-appropriate task assignments, such as:

Grades K-3 — Create job charts.

Grades 4-6 — Add specialized tasks to a weekly calendar.

Grades 7-9 — Allow a weeklong deadline for completion of tasks.

For all ages, require completion of tasks before granting allowance or weekend privileges.

■ **Encourage self-reliant behavior.** Tasks can include self-care, household chores, and completing school assignments. Initially work with the child until a skill is learned, then expect the child to assume responsibility.

■ **Focus on a child's contributions and assets.** Use sincere words of encouragement, appreciation, and admiration.

■ **Apply consequences to behavior choices.** Refrain from making excuses for your child. Predetermined and pre-advertised consequences hold children responsible for their choices and permit them to learn from experiences. A respectful, matter-of-fact tone of voice and willingness to accept the child's decisions are essential in formulating logical consequences.

■ **Be a mentor, but let your child resolve problems independently.** Avoid the role of referee during disagreements. Empower your child to settle conflicts, discuss grades with teachers, arrange car-pools for leisure activities, choose and finance birthday presents, and other age-appropriate tasks. **T**

SR. PATRICIA MCCORMACK, IHM, EDD is an international consultant and public speaker on issues of whole-person formation. Contact her at the IHM Office of Formative Support for Parents and Teachers or DrPatMcCormack@aol.com.